Chapter V

Conclusion
Chapter V

Conclusion

There are numerous theories today across all the disciplines in the academe of the world today. There were the times when the literary texts were construed as per the set norms and the propositions made by the established critics, whose word did not permit the reader to transcend the periphery chalked out by *him*, carried a thorough weight. However, it was the field of theory evolved from the ideologues that brought about a kind of upheaval that interrogated the cogency of conventional standards of exegesis. The Socratic tradition laid the foundation stone, it is known to the world, of the inquiry into the exhibits that were denominated as sacrosanct. Creative writing also situated itself within the frame of the prescriptive tradition. As an example, one could find it that a critic like A. C. Bradley was termed as almost the ultimate source for understanding Shakespeare. His *Shakespearean Tragedy* (2008) made a magnetic influence upon the ardent readers of the playwright. Moreover, as soon as the *critical* and *literary* theories flourished, the Bradleys started vanishing from the memory of the readers.

(2004) did not let the importance of the author wane. Additionally, the world was held into the whirlpool of Freud’s psychoanalysis. Karl Marx had already embroiled his readers between the base and superstructure and Bakhtin was behind the scenes ready with his polyglossia. These theorists did not stop existing even after their departure from the world—they still do reign the psyche and intellection of the academics. Paul de Man (2004) asserts that however one tries to resist the theory, one could not get rid of it. The theory is covered in the name of certain periods of time and in accordance with the schools it represents.

The subaltern theory is one of such phenomena. It belongs to the postcolonial times having a wide propogation. Basically it is the brainchild of Antonio Gramsci, an advocate of Marxism. The doubt remains, however, if it could work in the frame of Indian reference. India is a nation caught in double jeopardy of caste and class differences. That it has caste as its biggest dilemma, the Marxist theory of class could not work constructively in India as it has done outside. Should one resort to the concept of Dalit, the theory of caste would automatically follow in even covering class. Moreover, the concept would demand that one delve deep into the caste institution. Dalit thus becomes an extensive purview which could take in it the term, subaltern. Both the terms, notwithstanding, might attract criticism under the pretexts of humiliation and originary ground respectively.
In the thesis, the word *subaltern* is preferred to *Dalit* in that Mahasweta Devi’s writings deal more with the issue of *class* than that of *caste*. Also, she is put on a wide scale of academic fame abroad by Spivak, in specific, who has a Marxist orientation. Economic differentiation, rather than communal or social, fundamentally makes the subject matter of Mahasweta Devi’s creativity. Another key issue upon which Mahasweta Devi concentrates is that of politics. This is why her writings are best analysed on the basis of the ‘theory of class’.

The thesis has used the term *untouchable* in some places, although the constitution of India abolished it under *Article 17* of it, for the reason that it is ubiquitous in the artistic gestalt of Mahasweta Devi. The writer also has had a bent for use of the word *harijan* which invites a sense of revulsion at present and leads to fiery debates. Mahasweta Devi’s genre of fiction is so vast that it could have been hardly possible to cater for it on the whole, in the thesis. As the whole corpus of Mahasweta Devi’s art falls under the postcolonial times, attending to the theory of ‘postcolonialism’ in brief became a desideratum. The writer has penned almost the entire body of her work in Bengali, the vernacular of her domicile. Moreover, English rendering of it was given priority for the research purpose.

The word, *subaltern* means ‘inferior/lower in rank’— official, social, cultural, economic, etc. However, in the discourse of the thesis it does not mean ‘inferior by common or formal approbation’ but ‘conditioned
inferior’—enforced subalternity. G. C. Spivak’s essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* has formed the ground of analysis of the term herein. As Spivak has based her thesis on the position of women, the untouchables do not find their representation in the essay. This means that the essay falls short of including the other women that are the subalterns among the subalterns. It also dwells largely on the Eurocentric notions. Her ideas of marginalization, epistemic violence, other, self, erasure, subjugation, subjection, hegemony, deconstruction, essence of existence, androcentric discourse, etc. give some output to comprehend the notion of *subaltern*. She heavily relies on the western thinkers to clarify her position. The essay has been highly complex and controversial and not wholly plausible given its application in Indian context. It could not cover the range of caste phenomenon that remains at the core when it means marginalization. Indian marginalization mostly directs to the area of caste rather than class albeit the so called scholars and thinkers seek to fit the issue of caste into the framework of class. Whatever the case, the essay on the subaltern by Spivak helps one have an approach to the subalternized groups. Using it as a blueprint, one could develop a new structure of one’s way of application of it. Mahasweta Devi’s works are quite construable on the grounds of the essay.

*Postcolonial* homily has transposed the academicians, scholars and thinkers from their previous world to the current most challenging one
which is full of hybridity of discussions. As the term is designated to the post-imperial times, the post-British imperial times in particular, the discourse it affords tends to be synchronic and even superficial to a degree of certitude. For instance, India has been subject to many colonies beginning with the Aryans, therefore the post-British time theories could not give the precise picture of cultural interpretation. When one prepares a cultural critique of imperialism under the impact of coeval postcolonial theory, one is certain to miss on the factors related to the prevenient imperialism. This way Mahasweta Devi’s historic fiction, set in British period, misses the savagery exercised by the earlier imperialists. When she speaks of proselytisation of British times, she misses the forceful conversion that took place during the times of Moguls. When she comments on the cultural aspects of Hinduism, she misses on the hybridisation necessitated by the Aryans. This happens when the location of a theory is enforced by way of brainwash. It would attract a strong sense of disapproval if stated that compared to the rest of the colonizers, the British were far better in that they introduced modern education in India and reformed her to a fair degree, the move the preceding colonizers failed to fetch in. This is not to keep the British off the mark for their atrocities but acknowledge the decent side of them.

The *postcolonial theory* has, no doubt, broadened the ways of location of meaning. This is a special benefit it has inspired for the existing
generation and the posterity as well. It is with the help of it that the critics like Fanon, Achebe, Thiong’o could uncover the face of exploiters and falsity of secular inculcation. Moreover, the postcolonial theory does not go beyond colonialism; this is the shortcoming it holds.

Although translation could not proffer the identical sense, the English versions of Mahasweta Devi’s works keep the readers in a very close touch with originality. The renditions by Spivak, moreover, demand the readers to be strenuous at them. It is probably for that, that Salgado has termed her an ‘abusive translator’. The value of translation is unique per se. It prompts new learning as well as ministers in bringing out mutual transference of cults and cultures of various countries. The theory of polysystem as discussed earlier characterizes the significance of translation as it fishes around the cultural models. Translation is responsible in reaching Mahasweta Devi’s works to many countries and many a territory. There was no English rendering of Aranyer Adhikar available which is why the researcher had had to do his level best to provide the best possible quotes in English keeping in mind his own limits. To the best of the researcher’s understanding, it has worked to meet the purpose.

Mahasweta Devi’s stature as a writer has touched the heights of horizons of contemporary Indian Writing in English. She is a versatile creative artist that has generated the art of fiction, short fiction, drama and non-fiction prose. The special feature that marks her personality is her
activism. To be an activist, one is required to be bold and courageous. The
courage and boldness of Mahasweta Devi keep her up to par. She is an
enterprising writer beyond measure and this is what makes her only-of-her-
kind. Her fearlessness comes quite evident when she openly charges the
political, social and police systems. The systems have to run the gauntlet of
her works. While presenting her characters against the odds, Mahasweta
Devi quails at nothing. The presentation of Draupadi would speak volumes
for this. As the subaltern culture makes her area of interest, she devotes
herself to its cause. Her devotion towards the very culture especially
prospers through her Dust on the Road: Activist Writings of Mahasweta
Devi and collections of short stories. Bitter Soil is a collection that
comprises weird themes. The story, Shishu (Little Ones) is an account of
the severe starvation that cuts the physical growth of the tribals that grow in
age but their physique remains in miniature. The officer that discovers them
in the dead of night has to face the touch of their flaccid penises all around
his body. This is another instance of Mahasweta Devi’s bold presentation.

Mahasweta Devi has written another gothic story that keeps the
suspense sustained. The story is entitled as Daini (The Witch). A tribal
young girl, Somri, is impregnated by the son of a local feudal, Mishra, and
left in a distant forest and also haunted collectively by the people. In spite
of this nothing happens to the culprit. The collection Old Women is about
the women of Mahabharata subjected to ceaseless lament on the deaths of
their sons caused by Krishna who is blamed for his act by the women. Here Mahasweta Devi strongly holds on to the spirit of feminism. However hard she denies her role as a feminist, feminism naturally follows in her writings. She is also equally focused on the issues of caste. Mostly she gives rise to her political dissent. She daringly expresses her displeasure with India’s biggest political organisation, i.e., Congress. Her strong opposition to conversion to Christianity appears time and again. One has to appreciate the level of mettle she proves.

There are some vulnerable grounds of Mahasweta Devi, however, that hold the readers in aporia. Her contribution to heightening the subalterns is laudable, of course. Still what matters is her painting female characters from the subaltern category. There is not a single leading female character that wins dignity, self-esteem or honour. Draupadi’s nakedness is not only magnified but celebrated too; the gang rape she has suffered is a different thing. Gangor is gang raped; Rukhmani is raped time and again; Lachhima is subjected to droit de seigneur for life; Shanichari’s daughter-in-law is sent to prostitution and there are some others that go impoverished on the level of decorum. There are problems with the subalterns, a lot many of the hindrances, yet animating them on the ethical and civil grounds is much more inevitable for a writer than vitiating their character or committing them to violence. There are attempts on part of the male subalterns to fight out the injustices inflicted upon them but violence is
their resort. Despite all this, one is bound to acknowledge the effort of Mahasweta Devi to: bring to notice of the people the pathetic conditions of the subaltern matrix; and champion their cause. The approach of third wave feminism (20.06.2013) to Mahasweta Devi’s literature is pretty possible. The psychoanalytic, Marxist, ecocritical and deconstructive approaches definitely find scope in it.

Social Activism and Voices of Protest feature in the second chapter of the thesis. Mahasweta Devi reads the subaltern conditions in a professional manner and aims to better them through her art. Chotti Munda and His Arrow represents the evil circumstances of India, specifically in relation to the areas that were socially, geographically and economically backward or disadvantaged. Mahasweta Devi has voiced them with the best of her ability. She has produced the subaltern characters that act in a civil way as long as their patience lasts. Later on, they subscribe to violence. It seems that when the politeness fails, Naxalism becomes forte of Mahasweta Devi. Another characteristic of Chotti Munda is that Mahasweta Devi appears to be a Luddite because she consistently critiques the way things go in the name of modernization in the novel. The writer has focalised the natural abilities of the tribals, especially their being so good at archery. Their civility and humanity have been well attended to by the writer. Besides this, the defeatist mental make-up of the characters comes to prominence in the novel. Yet this does not mean they give in for the triumph goes in their
favour and they have the last laugh. Their activism and protest finally pay off. *Mother of 1084* is full of activism and protest. It features the young generation from the subaltern and *Bhadralok* groups. There transpires to be an arduous desire of them to protest against the widespread malevolence. They wish to reform the system but the camouflaged traitors among themselves would not let it happen. Mahasweta Devi has closely examined the overall environs of the contemporaneous West Bengal. The story does not get wholly involved with the motto of fight against the dissipated surrounding. It also centres on the bond of affection between a mother and her son. There is a deviation to the in-house impropriety and loss of moral values to an uncertain limit. The text does not free itself from the influence of Naxalism. It sort of implements the ideology of Marxism to establish the values of equality. As mentioned earlier, Marxism could not succeed in offering a solution to the Indian barrier since its roots do not violate the fixed grounds of class system. Of course, the activism of Mahasweta Devi does not lose its worth. The text also forms a premise that if one keeps with and fights in the interest of the subalterns, regardless of caste consciousness, one is treated no better than a subaltern. Sujata and Brati are the ones suffering the angst of being subalternized by their own people, the elites.

In *Bashai Tudu* the phenomenon of caste is hit at more often. Bashai always acts under the burden of caste reality. His sacrifice and commitment
towards the party he works for bear no fruit as his case blocks him all the way. He takes support of means of violence to fight back. The chief implication of the text is that caste pursues one wherever one goes. A better expansion of this statement could be found in Thorat and Newman (2012).

Mahasweta Devi appears to have taken into account the burning issue of caste in ‘Bashai Tudu’.

The third chapter has brought to attention the actual plight of the subalterns with a view to black humour. A problem that sometimes persists with Mahasweta Devi is that she treats the tribal subalterns on a slightly upper scale as compared to the untouchables. This particularly happens in the texts like Chotti Munda and Aranyer Adhikar. However, it does not cause a worry to the reader. The texts like Breast Stories and The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh form the picture of ambivalent experience. On the one hand, they make the readers reflective and fail them greatly on the other.

Lachhima is the worst of all the characters Mahasweta Devi has ever portrayed. It is quite unimaginable a persona—utterly helpless, no ethics, no resistance, no protest, highly revolting, and absolute surrender to the carnal desire. Draupadi is another image of abhorrence. The way Mahasweta Devi designs her is horrendous. Moreover, her counterattack arouses the black humour. Bait follows the same element of Naxalism issuing from poverty. Dewana Khoimala and the Holy Banyan Tree puts something different to the auditor. It could better be interpreted on the
grounds of child psychology. Poverty hounds the players in it to a large
degree.

*The Mother of Dusk and Dawn* is a victim of superstitious beliefs of
the Indians. The writer has kept abreast of the dark spiritual side of India.
When an idler youth weighs the hot plate of rice more than his mother’s
life, nothing could be sadder than this on part of a son. After all starvation
is a malady omnipresent in the works of Mahasweta Devi and outside.
*Rudali* is a touching account of the old and the baseless whose life is
fraught with destitution of multiple types. The same woman suffers as the
bereaved: wife, mother, grandmother and friend. The women from the
established fabric are just given to fun. They wait for deaths in their
families so as to celebrate the funerals in so grand a fashion. The
competition of celebration between them gives rise to black humour. This is
where humanity loses its grounds. Mahasweta Devi has dealt with it with
great success.

The last chapter has handled the subaltern history. The records of
Indian history brim with the elite heroics but there is no room for the
subalterns even to peep in them. This is a tragical fact of the past records of
India. Mahasweta Devi has looked for need of the hour and has celebrated
the roles of the subalterns in history. She has contradicted the inculcation
that the the elites are the harbingers of revolt and revolution and only they
are the contributors to freedom movement. The tribal *rebellions* have to be
credited for that in actuality. It was the tribals that lit up the flame of revolt a century in advance of the recognized revolt is what the message that spontaneously comes out of Mahasweta Devi’s record. Birsa Munda’s movement is unrivalled in this country. His fight and ideology still make their presence felt. Bedanabala germinates a deep feeling that when it matters most, the outcasts stand second to none in recording their contribution towards the national cause; it is no monopoly of the instituted groups. The Queen of Jhansi is an example of the spirit of feminism, even Bedanabala is so, that inspired Mahasweta Devi to celebrate a female that fought against her enemies in the face of disastrous eventualities. The biography keeps pace with historical evidences and realities. It has resulted out of the passion of the writer. The text also highlights some events of which the subalterns become part. History of India has remained so far a case of simulation, to use the term of Baudrillard (2004).

Mahasweta Devi’s works share multifarious dimensions. Subalternity, marginality and dehumanization are the key concepts occurring in her works. She exercises all her capability to connect the periphery to the mainstream. Her works contain redemptive quality somewhere and, what Iser (2004) would call, the gaps somewhere else. She uses the language almost in the vein of Cixous (2004) which is racy yet natural. Subservience becomes the byword of her untouchable characters whereas Ruskin Bond (1999) paints a satisfactory picture of his
untouchable persona; her bypassing Ambedkar\(^1\) while unfolding the untouchables’ life remains an incoherent phenomenon.

Mahasweta Devi’s nomination to the Nobel Prize for Literature sets the proof that she is a dynamic and inimitable writer who breaks the mirror to realize if reality is hiding on the other side of it. Thus reading Mahasweta Devi makes, without fail, an exhilarating experience for the reader.

Notes

1. Bhagwan Das, a most renowned north Indian scholar says: ‘The time I spent with him [Dr Ambedkar], the books written on him, his own speeches and writing— everything has consolidated my belief that Babasaheb was a great leader who struggled for the emancipation of Indian society. What Babasaheb did for untouchables and won for them does not find any parallel anywhere in the world’. (In Pursuit of Dr Ambedkar 62)

Works Cited


**Webliography**
